

Background: Ella Svedberg (1907-1960) was missionary in East Turkestan 1935-1938. She came back to Sweden and then went to India and worked there 1945-1960. This tape might be recorded in 1955. (Information from the records of paper)

SF: Missionary Ella Svedberg. We will listen to that she tells me about her live in East Turkestan and then in India.

ES: A country (in Swedish: ett land) which was very isolated, A country which was very different from the Western countries (in Swedish: västerland). There were man-made water systems. It did not rain there, no precipitation.

SF: Did water taken from the inland's lake?

ES: No, the water came from the snow from the mountain under spring time. There was a channel system which led the water to where we lived. Where there was no water where you could not live a life. People did take care of the water systems, they did good job, the summer was long and warm (hot).

SF: How did they living there?

ES: They lived in clay and brick house which we called quite primitive. Most small houses but there were two floors houses but most one floor with flat roofs. The windows and the glasses were very thin so they had paper on the glasses. The winter could be very cold. I have been with when it was minus 20 degree cold but only in Dec and Jan. In Feb it became warm again. It became warm quickly even if it was highland (?).

SF: Did they heat with trees?

ES: They had so-called Kang, raising built in almost half room height. Made of brick and inside they had fire. They had bed upon the Kang and it made the room warm. If they did not have it they did not have another warming system. They had chimney to the roof. It could be very cold. As soon as there was sunshine, they sat in sunshine outside the house.

SF: Are they hard-working people?

ES: Yes, they took care of their lives. They had their own religion. They had agriculture, had maize, millet and a lot of fruits and vegetables.

SF: How was that with other climates?

EF: We worked also within Turks Mohammedans. It was not easy. We had been there 25 years tills we were driven out of the communists. There were quite little Christian, not a lot, they had their own religion.

SF: How was a day in the mission's station there?

ES: In Turkestan it was a bit different (Perhaps she compared with India?)

SF: Where in Turkestan?

ES: I worked in a place called Jarkand. That was a very nice station, big area, because the land was cheap there and it was cheap to build there too. We had a school, a church and a hospital. We worked in the hospital, as the same as I do here. I was called to work whole days, here and there, sometimes there were emergencies, especially when it was childbirth. We had both Turks and Chinese, at that time it was a Chinese province. There came people from different places. Three or four missionaries worked in the hospital. There were several interpreters. We had most male workers, not had females all the time, we had a woman who helped us when it was childbirth. Then we had special workers who took care of the school. So everyday seemed the same.

SF: How was their hygiene?

ES: Not precisely cleaned themselves. They did not understand to protect themselves against diseases. When I went there I thought to put up a note to tell the women how to take care of their kids against the dirty but it was not a good idea because they could not read.

SF: Were they long-suffering?

ES: Yes they were, could bear pain and suffering, it was strange that they lived a nature life and had a powerful insistance against infection. By the difficult childbirth they came to us,

they could do easy childbirth at home. They made themselves and it was fantastic. They didn't want to stay in the hospital they wanted to go home after the childbirth.

SF: It depends on their situation, climate, and so on?

ES: Yes, they are living in it with risks and they seemed be immune against some diseases.

SF: Has sister worked mainly in the hospital?

ES: In Turkestan, yes, not in India.

SF: How do you feel to leave there?

ES: Not so good. They* (who?) started to pursue us. They took Christians. Even those who worked for us who were not Christians, they took a lot of them. We went on for a month, the school kids were taken too, we went on working in the hospital because people still came to us. But after a month they fired the hospital.

SF: It must be hard.

ES: Yes, not only for us, they burnt down a lot of houses, we lost the medicines and other main things, after a month there left only 5 persons of us, only foreigners there. We didn't have a passport, could not contact other stations because of the civil war. So about one month after the hospital destroyed we became driven out from there. We didn't have so much transport equipment, didn't know if we would go to the countryside, anyway we must go to Kashgar. It took us 10 days to go there with horses and carts. We didn't get anyone who dared to drive us. The other station had the same situation, the Christians were taken. The hospital was opened as long as it could. We went by another station but no body there. Finally we were 17 missionaries and two kids. We were isolated and shut outside the wall. People were afraid to help us, people didn't come to us with food but we had expect that so we had with us sheep and cows so we could slack them and we baked bread. It took months to get the papers. We tried to travel to inland. We were accused to be spies. We travelled home via Russia, two groups with a week time between, three people stayed. The consulate asked the Swedish government to help us but it was late. We stayed, not so hard, we had even parties, the only printing works was there. So anyway we were two groups with 7 persons in a group to travelled home via Russia. But we didn't stay long at home and then went to India, it took three months. Nice trip.

(12:41 minutes.)

(Then Ella told about her work in Indian. She had worked in three places there; I can distinguish Bombay but not the other two places which sound like Pona and Shulahu.)

SF: How were you at home?

EF: It was 1938, we got message that we would go to India. 1939 the war started. At the beginning of 1940 five persons could go to India but after that it was not possible. No one could leave for India because of the war. I stayed at home till spring 1945 and left for India. We would work with Mohammedans, Indian and Turkish who were totally different language, different group and different people. ...

SF: How was your first impression when you arrived there?

ES: Asia is Asia anyway. We travelled out under the war, quite dramatic, we got message and were told to where we would go etc. They knew we were on the way. No one met us in India, it was still war. We took our luggage and took taxi, a long way to where we would live. The taxi driver found the way so we came directly there. We travelled with a boat called Drottningholm which was rented by German. They fetched prisoners from Turkey and transported them back to Germany. We were 44 missionaries and one Turban from the beginning. The half left for Lisa born and then to Africa, the rest went on. We celebrate Eastern by the Mediterranean Sea, in Malta in a tent. On Good Friday we had God service. Then we came to Portside and got off but we didn't know how to continue. But it was managed by the Swedish consultant in Cairo. We stayed in Cairo five days and then took train to Silos. In Silos a man at the travel agency took care of us. We had lunch and then he took us with a boat to a large English transport ship. It was the largest boat by Silos it was British to transport soldiers from Japanese war. We were allowed to take it, nine missionaries. (...)

Then we travelled to a language school in the Himalayan Mountains. We arrived in April and then in August we started to work.

FS: How is the climate on the way to Himalayan?

ES: Like Swedish summer, warmer under day time than here. At night and in shadows it was chill and it rained sometimes. There were three seasons there, hot time, warm time and cold time.

FS: A bit short description about your time there, the places and special memories?

ES: I have been three places, Bombay five year, the other one, Pona (?), a period and the third one, Shulahu (?). We worked in Bombay among Mohammedans. There were 40 millions Mohammedans in India, otherwise they lived in Pakistan. There were many languages there, every province has its own language and some people could two or three languages. Certainly we contacted them who spoke same language as we did. We didn't have any missionary station.

FS: no?

ES: No, we didn't own any place, we rented places. We bought one house in Pona city. We got guidelines from home that we would not buy any house. Now we have a house to live in. Because we could not live as Indians to stay on the clay floor all the time. We rented a reading room where people could read magazines and books and above all Bible. We waited for Mohammedans. We could not expect a Mohammedans to come to church. We had to meet them one by one personally.

FS: Don't you have any meeting there?

ES: Yes we had. In the reading room we had the door opened and we sang and we preached. Lots of people stood outside on the street. It had been different from place to place, in Shulahu it did go well at all but it went well in Pona and Bombay. People came from the street outside to listen to us. We didn't have our own church. We shared the church with other parish. There was an old church in Bombay which was built by English methodical church. There we had four God service in four different languages. In Pona we rented a military church. The city has a half million people, a military town. There are colleges and universities too. There are ten churches and only we had God service in language kermarati (?), English and ?. In Shulahu we shared a church with other two American parishes.

FS: Is there any different focus? Protestant?

ES: I can not say that. In the language schools there were over 100 associations, there were many kinds of churches from America.

FS: A strange mix with Catholics and Protestants.

ES: Yes, many different kinds of Pentecostal churches which were founded by different groups. But in the language school or when we had holiday together there was always a union church and a high church (?). Then we didn't ask which association people belonged to.

FS: You had God service together.

ES: Yes, over the border, in common.

FS: What did you think the most needed in India? Were the material stuffs which they need?

ES: Food, it says that millions of people starving, just one meal per day.

FS: was that true?

ES: Yes, it is true. Poverty has no border. It feels helpless to see the beggars, but even those who had a job they had lots of kids so food was not enough for the family. It was hard to understand how those kids survival. So there were several projects, the state tried to learn people agriculture, to cultivate and to reap to get more food, and limit the birth rate. They had built childcare centres to teach the mothers to take care of their kids, and vaccination, against diseases and live longer. But when they live longer they got hungry.

FS: It sounds strange that on one hand they had to make more people living longer and on the other hand they had to limit the birth rate.

ES: Even they had epidemics and diseases every year. Many people died and the infants died too because of the lack of insistence. But the population increased anyway.

FS: This will be changed automatically as soon as they adapt the western culture.

ES: If they would ever adapt the Western culture. Well, I mean the Western culture is not the best as well. The government had project to raise the living standards, to decrease the population and so on. They had now the second five-year plan since the independency. They had done a good job; their Prime Minister was a skilful and nice man. They tried with projects, with education in the schools, etc. but it will take a long time to change the situation in the countryside.

FS: What more do you think they need?

ES: We thought of course that they needed Christianity. Christianity had existed in India for a long time. There were churches in south India called Thomas church. Syrian church had been there for a long time too. But Christianity had not been the main stream.

FS: Why, what did that depend?

ES: Well, why, Englishmen had been here and there. They called themselves Christian; they went to church on Sundays. They lived as masters, repressed the Indians and treated them as lower class. I would not like to tell about how they lived there. It was not seen but it could be felt. Christianity lost the power by that. Both Hinduism and Mohammedanism were strong religions there. Hinduism är strongast, all Indian People were religious. Back to Sweden I wondered why people don't go to church even if we are Christians.

SF: Why will they become Christian? Do you think they are the same as you?

ES: No (?).

SF: How do you know that?

ES: We have seen a lot. They lived always with their own Gods. They sacrificed for their Gods; they were afraid and admired their Gods.

FS: Are you sure?

ES: Yes, very sure. In Christianity we have love but love does not exist in Mohammedans religions. They were frightened that they would be punished if they didn't do well. Their Gods were not so close to us. You have to do this and do that to please the Gods. (long pause). It is not easy for us to get new missionaries. Some of us will retire soon. We have no one to replace them. We need new missionaries. We educated the Indians and made them Pastors to our four parishes.

SF: Has it been difficult to permission to work there?

ES: Not at all, several persons have applied and got the permission. We didn't get any resistance from either the government or from the people. Nobody stopped us from reading, preaching, receiving visitors. We can go on.

SF: You did have a Mohammedan who was interested in Protestants.

ES: Yes, it is a long history.

SF: You may tell us in short.

ES: A person with the name Adelphy will come to Sweden next year.

SF: Interesting.

ES: We have invited him. He was from shulahu. He was the teacher in a Mohammedans school, teaching Arabian and Mohammedans theology. He was a leader of God service in a mosque. He had gone to school in Northern Indian. He had contact with a Pastor at a street meeting and got a book in secrecy. One day one of the pastors and a missionary went to a mosque. There was a club for youth. I have been there several times. They were nice, friendly and polite. They didn't kick you out, instead they invited you for tea. That day the missionary noticed a young man was very eager to ask questions and very intelligent. That young man was Adelphy. Later, he came alone to the mission, he was interested. But several older Mohammedans didn't like him to visit the mission. One day Adelphy came to the mission without the hat which Mohammedans had. The Mission guessed that something had happened but didn't ask. Adelphy didn't say anything either. Another day he came again and he told the mission that in Mosque he stood up and confessed that he read the Bible and he said he believed in the Christian God. It became a rebellion in the mosque and he was dismissed from

the mosque. His relatives didn't like that either. So he went to Bombay and baptized there. His wife stayed by his side. After two or three years she became convinced on Christianity. They were sent to Northern Indian to teach because they could speak the language. We paid them. We do need such young people ...

SF: Now we will listen to an Indian song of Ella.

EF: A song which we sang often. Come and let us meet each other. (Ella then sings a song in Indian language).

SF: Here finishes the interview.